

100 Ways of Using Data to Make Lives Better

A series from The Farr Institute of Health Informatics Research showcasing the UK's most significant examples of using data in research

Long-lived parents means you could live longer too

A study involving almost 190,000 participants found that our chances of survival increased by 17 per cent for each decade that at least one parent lives beyond the age of 70.



Luke Pilling, Janice Atkins et al, University of Exeter Medical School
Luting Xue and Joanne Murabito, Boston University
Kathryn Lunetta, The Framingham Heart Study
Jean Marie Robine, Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale
Carol Brayne, University of Cambridge
George Kuchel, University of Connecticut
Luigi Ferrucci and David Melzer, National Institute on Aging

Public Health
Case Study 99

The Challenge

The role of genetics in determining the age at which we die is increasingly known, but can we assume that if our parents lived to a high age that we will too?

The Research

A team of researchers from the University of Exeter (working with colleagues in the US, France and India) used data on the health of 186,000 middle-aged people, aged 55 to 73 years, followed over a period of up to eight years. They then compared this data to the age at which the participants' parents died to see if there was a connection.

The Results

The research team found that the older a participant's parents were at their death, the longer the participant lived. This was true even when participants' age, sex, ethnicity, education, income, smoking, alcohol use, physical activity and body mass index were taken into account.

In fact, our chances of survival increase by 17 per cent for each decade that at least one parent lives beyond the age of 70.

The team also found that those with longer lived parents had lower incidence of a range of conditions including heart disease, heart failure, stroke, high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels and atrial fibrillation. In addition, those with longer lived parents also had reduced risk of cancer.

The Impact

This was the largest study to show that the longer your parents live, the more likely you are to remain healthy in your sixties and seventies. Asking about parents' longevity could help doctors predict their patients' likelihood of ageing well and developing conditions such as heart disease and treat them appropriately.

It is important to note that these findings were group-level effects and don't necessarily apply to individuals, as so many factors affect one's health.

While the results show that people with longer-lived parents are more likely to live longer themselves, they do not mean people with shorter-lived parents should lose hope. There are many ways for those with shorter-lived parents to improve their health.

Being physically active, eating well, and not smoking are all lifestyle choices that play a big role in keeping healthy and having a long life.

For more information visit:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27015805>

Enquiries to Sarah Toomey, Communications Officer, Farr Institute CIPHER, s.toomey@swansea.ac.uk